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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 002017

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTORAL MOVES: KAMITATU GAMBIT COULD BRING  
DOWN MLC

REF: KINSHASA 2001

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) The long-simmering tension between MLC president (and DRC Vice President) Jean-Pierre Bemba and National Assembly President Olivier Kamitatu (the Secretary General and number two of the MLC) has reached an explosive point which is fracturing the party. The divorce appears to have been triggered by Pierre Pay Pay's decision to form a political group and run for president in the upcoming elections. Pay Pay was quickly joined by former MLC minister, Jose Endundu, whose "defection" may have encouraged Kamitatu to consider the Pay Pay coalition group as an alternative political vehicle for him to become prime minister in the post-Transistion government.

12. (C) While not having officially declared his intention to jump ship (a fine but potentially important point), Kamitatu did circulate a letter November 24 to MLC Assembly members, asking them to consider actively joining him in merging with the Pay Pay group (a suggestion supported by 22 MLC parliamentarians, according to Thomas Luhaka, head of the MLC component in the Assembly). Bemba seized on the letter as a declaration of Kamitatu's intent to switch allegiance and, after meeting personally with MLC deputies November 27, convoked a meeting of the party's founding members December 1 to ask that Kamitatu's name be officially expunged from the party's rolls, and that he be removed from his position as President of the National Assembly. The founders meeting approved both proposals, but Kamitatu is not going quietly into that good night. He fired back in a published statement December 5, in which he said that he had never resigned from the party, characterized his letter as merely proposing an electoral alliance with the Pay Pay group, and pointed to the transitional constitution as guaranteeing his position as Assembly President. In response, Bemba announced December 9 that Kamitatu has been replaced as Secretary General of the party by former Minister of Budget Francois Mwamba. (Comment: The move allows Bemba to try to mend fences with the key Equateur delegation in his party while at the same time avoids centralizing too much power in one man's hands, as had been the case with Kamitatu who was both Secretary General and President of the Assembly. End Comment.)

13. (C) The plot continues to thicken. Moise Nyaranbagu, head of the RCD component in the Assembly (and a lawyer) said that actually the transitional constitution contains two conflicting provisions, one of which identifies the President, the four Vice Presidents and the President of the National Assembly as positions whose incumbents must remain in place for the duration of the transition. However, a second provision equally clearly says that the position of National Assembly President is allocated to the MLC party and must be occupied by a member of that component. Therefore, Nyarangabu said, Bemba does have, at least technically, the right to demand Kamitatu's dismissal since he has been officially removed from the MLC party. The key element, he said, would be whether Kamitatu has indeed actually lost the support of President Kabila and the PPRD party, as is popularly rumored. If true, he mused, Kamitatu probably is out of a job -- and, he added, has certainly in any event overplayed his hand by alienating both Kabila and Bemba simultaneously.

14. (C) Thomas Luhaka, head of the MLC component in the Assembly, told PolCouns December 6 that Bemba already has contacted Kabila to propose that he, Luhaka, replace Kamitatu as President of the National Assembly and that supposedly Kabila indicated his approval. This might indeed be the case. PolCouns had already spoken December 3 with Augustin Katumba, Kabila's senior advisor, who said that President Kabila was deeply hurt by Kamitatu's decision to "railroad" the Amnesty Law through the Assembly over his clearly expressed objections (reftel). Katumba said that Kabila now regards Kamitatu (who had been extremely close to and cooperative with the PPRD for the last year) as a "traitor," and speculated that if Bemba wished to remove Kamitatu that the President would not object.

15. (C) Comment: Kamitatu may have overplayed his hand, but the game is far from over. Legal actions will most certainly be pursued, and our guess is that Bemba's MLC indeed has the legal right to replace Kamitatu at the National Assembly. Definitive rulings, however, will take time. Of more likely

relevance in any event are the politics of the evolving situation, including the strength of whatever parliamentary and party support Kamitatu establishes for himself. Taking Kamitatu out of the President's chair would also pose potential problems for passage of remaining key legislation, including the electoral law. The repercussions for the MLC and both men of the Bemba-Kamitatu conflict are only just beginning to emerge. The most likely at the moment seems to be that the MLC breaks apart before next year's elections. This would be particularly problematic for Bemba, who has spent the transition looking out for his own interests while refusing to safeguard and reward his followers. He now has very little leverage with which to encourage party members to stay his course. Kamitatu, by far the more popular and well-regarded, can make a legitimate argument that he will assist (including financially) with the electoral campaigns of those who choose to follow him.

16. (C) Comment (continued): As for the PPRD, they likely see an opportunity to weaken two potential rivals at the same time by fueling the fire, since Kamitatu's "defection" from the MLC could leave Bemba with just a rump element but Bemba's likely reprisals and the vagaries of ongoing political realignments could also leave Kamitatu in a vulnerable position. Kabila, however, may be sensitive of the risks to urgent Transition milestones such as the election law that would follow an abrupt Kamitatu removal. If so, he could at minimum delay any overt move to cooperate with Bemba. Caution in any event generally characterizes Kabila's actions. Initial discussion of the situation within the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) focused on the risks to pending key legislation, but as well on the need to steer clear of involvement in the internal politics of the situation. End comment.  
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